

avoided. Paper may be grafted onto paper and, by use of a semi-liquid paper pulp, missing parts of a fragmentary sheet may be built on, so as scarcely to be distinguishable from the old. Fragile sheets are strengthened by an almost invisible gauze (*crêpe laine*) sized and pressed on.

These are some of the methods in the care of books, outlined more by way of suggestion than in the expectation of covering the subject. Any attempt even to outline all the methods would exceed the limitations of the ordinary article and yet remain noticeable for its omissions only.

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## HOSPITAL RECORDS IN RELATION TO THE HOSPITAL LIBRARY.

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In venturing to call your attention for a few minutes this evening to his subject I may be guilty of an egoism, for it is to my own particular work in one of the large institutions of the country that I wish to speak. The position of librarian and keeper of records is one which is unique and full of interest. Few hospitals have their own medical libraries, and all hospitals do not make a specialty of the care of their clinical records. Many institutions are small and have not available funds; others do not appreciate the extraordinary value which these histories have as a basis for medical research; and still others care so little for them that they are not preserved at all.

There never was a time when more was done in the line of medical research. To mention a few of the subjects which are of vital interest at the present time: there is the etiology of cancer, and the treatment of cancer; the diagnosis of gastric and duodenal ulcers; the wonderful use of radium; the study of acute anterior poliomyelitis; the study of pellagra; and latest of all, the Ehrlich-Hata treatment of syphilis. And as each new topic comes into evidence, there is a watch kept of hospital cases, and a study made of them as fast as the records are available; and new methods of treatment are continually being compared with older methods. All this goes to prove that the young hospital should carefully preserve its clinical histories from number one, and as soon as possible put them in shape for use and study. At the Massachusetts General Hospital, now in its ninetieth year of service, fundamentally the same system of recording patients has been maintained since its opening; and while it is only for the last thirteen years or more that a special custodian has been appointed for these treasures, be it said to the great credit of the two founders of the Institution whose methods have been passed on to succeeding generations, not one single record is missing from a collection which now numbers 1731 volumes. The names of Jackson and Warren, heading the long list of those who have honored the Visiting Staff, are famous in the annals of the Hospital, and stand for the stern, rigorous and just methods which characterized its management in the early days, and are still its inspiration as it rounds out a century of noble work. To one who has the time and the inclination to delve among these records and follow on from decade to decade, noting the great changes which have taken place in treatment and the decreasing mortality in certain maladies which once were always fatal, an absorb-

ing story unfolds. And it is worth preserving to its very latest word, for it forms a part of the great history of medicine. If it were possible for those whose duty it is to write them to realize what it all means, not only to the present but to future generations, how much more care would they take in the performance of what to many, at the time, seems an arduous and useless task.

If there is a hospital library, records should be kept in close proximity to it, and, if possible, come under the supervision of the librarian. With theory and fact thus brought into close relation, an atmosphere is created of study and investigation which to the doctor has a value beyond estimate. Usually, for lack of space, the library cannot become a storehouse for valuable old literature and first editions, to the great regret of the librarian. It is essentially and primarily a working library where files of periodicals, reprints, monographs, government documents of certain departments, studies from various laboratories, transactions and proceedings of societies, and latest editions of textbooks are in constant demand. For here comes the surgeon early in the morning to refresh his mind at the last moment upon the technique of the operation which is waiting for his skillful hand; or, the physician who is pondering over a case of difficult diagnosis comes for assistance; the house officer spends many of his spare moments here, and the student comes to study up some special case.

For the young medical librarian there is no better field of training than just this work among hospital records. A glance at the routine of work will show its value. There is the daily inspection of the charts of patients discharged on the previous day; the weekly inspection of entire records of all patients discharged during the previous week, and at this time the attaching of all accessory papers relating to each record, the cataloging of each by name, the filing of these cards, and the temporary filing of records. Then there is the preparation for binding, a careful task involving much detail, and including the making of a double index at the end of each volume. After binding comes the indexing of each separate history for the clinical catalogues; *i.e.*, a card for every diagnosis and one for every anatomical region affected, with copious cross references.

An additional and very important part of the work is the copying or abstracting of such histories as are frequently requested by the Court, or by a physician, or by a patient himself. This constant reading of records, with the knowledge it brings of medical nomenclature and therapeutics of every variety is invaluable as means of instruction. To the question asked of my assistants at one time and another as to what part of their work has helped them most toward a general understanding of the whole, the answer has invariably been the same: "The copying of records." A fund of knowledge is gradually acquired in this way which I do not believe would be so thoroughly acquired in any other way. There are frequently difficult handwritings to decipher, misspelled words to make out, and unfamiliar words whose proper spelling must be looked up and definitions learned. For no work of this sort should ever be done in machine-like fashion, but with as thorough an understanding as possible.

It has been said that for down-right bad spelling clergymen take the lead. I do not believe it. Nothing could be worse than some of the unpronounceable Greek, Latin and German derivatives which the medical student has to meet, and does not always conquer. And this does not infer that he always does conquer good plain English. It is not long since I read of a patient who was treated with "turpentine *stoops*," and of another whose appearance was "*pail* and anemic," and of still one more who "complained of pain at *sight* of old scar." Abbreviations

of every possible kind, authorized and unauthorized, are made use of, until the copyist is sometimes at her wits' end to translate into legible print. But "accuracy" is the chief aim and it must be attained though much time is often consumed over the study of a single point. Here is where the medical library becomes the sister work, furnishing the dictionaries and textbooks which are necessary. The constant skimming of journals and books grows to be a work of intense interest, and as the desire for knowledge along the lines peculiar to the institution increases, its acquirement becomes a source of great satisfaction. One never grows weary of the work for it is always new.

It has also its amusing side, for in common with other librarians we are expected to be walking encyclopedias, funds of general information, complete spellers, pronouncers and definers of all the many-syllabled words contained in medical nomenclature. For instance: "What is the name of that operation where connection is established between the gall bladder and the duodenum?" "Cholecystoduodenostomy." "Oh, yes; how do you spell it?" On one occasion a house officer came rushing into my office with the question: "Can you tell me what year Pope Pius IX died?" An answer was made in true Yankee fashion by asking a return question. "Will you please tell me what possible connection the death of Pope Pius IX has with this place?" He then explained that a patient had just been sent into his ward who had been a patient some years before, he could not remember the exact date, but it was the year that Pope Pius IX died. The house officer wished to look up the old record. As luck would have it the date was rather closely connected with another event of more personal moment and was immediately furnished, with the result that the record was quickly found. At another time a member of the Staff said "Will you tell me what county Boston is in?" The memorizing of counties has always been one of my difficulties, but fortune favored me in this instance. The last unusual question was "When does the Bermuda mail close?" This was beyond me, and the questioner was referred to the daily newspaper.

It is all work of unflagging interest. A library is always a place where the spirit of rest and refreshment seems to dwell, and to him who has helped bring about this atmosphere there is a sense of satisfaction in the well-doing of a good work. In this library of hospital records there is a spirit of onward movement, and a spirit of inspiration, an undercurrent of energy, which in combination with the restful atmosphere is like the freshening breeze that fills the sail and carries the good ship on into new and unknown waters. And to him who cares for it all with the proper sense of his responsibilities comes an opportunity for personal influence which may be as far-reaching as he chooses to make it, for through his efforts it is possible to bring to light a wealth of material which might otherwise remain forever in obscurity.

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## NEWS ITEMS.

The Luzerne County Medical Society Library has For Sale Vs. 19-100 inclusive, 1850-1890 of the American Journal of Medical Sciences, bound in sheep and in good condition. The price per volume is \$.50. For further information concerning these books communicate with Dr. Lewis H. Taylor, Anthracite Building, Wilkes Barre, Pa.